

REVIEW

These two books are (surprise, surprise!) possessed in common of much more than one might at first anticipate. Unless you Know Someone Who Owns Them or the Library In Its Beneficence invests in one or both, you'll never see either. And the reasons for that say a lot about the State of Australian Poetry. Let's look at 'em in turn:—

Poet's Choice, 1973 is nothing if not a Nice Book of Nice Poems by Nice Poets. Everything about it is rather "naice" (Queen's English pronunciation) and therefore both comfortable and safe. It fits an ideal formula: select 30 or so of the leading names in Australian poetry and ask each for one unpublished poem. Then publish the result in "a handset single edition of 500 copies, of which this is number. . ." Finally dispose of them at a Reasonable Price Commensurate With the Er Quality of the Contents — thereby making (I assume) a Reasonable Profit Considering the Amount of Work Involved in the Preparation of the Volume.

Which is all Very Nice for Island Press, but

In the long run Poets Choice reflects the sort of mutual back scratching that seems to be endemic (unfortunate, but fairly undebatable) to the Australian Poetry scene. It's the sort of thing that tends to perpetuate establishments and possibly to promote poets to a rank above their actual levels of competence. It's the same syndrome that led one writer to label the New York Review of Books "the New York Review of Each Other's Books" As far as perpetuating the Establishment, consider the contributors (R.D. Fitzgerald, Rodney Hall, J.S. Harry, Gwen Harwood, A.D. Hope, Peter Porter, Thomas Shapcott, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Judith Wright — 113 of them). All well known, widely published. No new names. Looking at the poems confirms your suspicions — 30 good safe poems by 30 good safe poets. Nothing startling. All competent technically, but BLAND; none of them particularly outstanding. One or two are downright BAD — A.D. Hope's "O Be A Fine Girl," Very Clever though it is, should have found trouble being published anywhere: yet here it is on Page 26 of what is supposedly the Best Poems Chosen By The Best Poet for 1973.

Books like this are the Established Poet's dream: if you're invited, I assume they have to print the poem you submit. And poets tend, I think, to be possibly the least capable judges of their own work, not least because they are then required to sit in judgement on part of themselves. Wouldn't it be far more worthwhile to get the "Top 30" Australian poets to pick their "poem of the year" by another Australian Writer and publish them with the selectors' comments?

Which is a convenient point to change horses and look at Joanne Burns' Ratz. Ms Burns' work can be summed up in two words — interesting, but... She's one of those extremely and possibly uncomfortably contemporary writers who you're semi-afraid to criticize in case you appear to be on the wrong side of the Creative Generation Gap - labelled, that is, as Unreceptive to New Ideas. She's seemingly accumulated all the right influences.

There're plenty of "yr"'s which seem to be the most easy criterion to judge whether a poet imagines himself to be Contemporary or even Slightly Avant Garde. So she's half way there. The trouble is that she lacks the sort of undefinable Something that could turn her from an interesting minor poet into someone worthy of attention as an Up And Coming Young Poet. She's

definitely competent and on occasion presents an image that fires the imagination : that is, in other words, arresting. Her problem (and the one that presents the major obstacle to me, at least) is the way she often finds a thoroughly memorable image or passage which collapses because the rest of the poem isn't strong enough to support its weight.

The writing tends, in addition, to be muddy : like a river carrying a lot of sediment, Ms Burns' poetry could definitely be improved by disposing of some of the dross — if you wanted to be severe you could call it padding — by filtering it out of her poems (as I said before, poets can be extremely poor judges of their own work). But balancing the sediment that fails to carry its own weight, Ms Burns' poetry does undeniably have its moments of sheer joy, of images well wrought and with a refreshing degree of originality. Yes, it is all very contemporary, but as opposed to the more avant-garde writing of recent times it still seems to be intended as poetic with a capital P. Overall its' good, worthwhile stuff; but at \$1.50 for 24 pages and a cover not, perhaps, good value for money. But if new faces with any degree of originality are going to emerge it will be in books like these, not in the sterile wasteland of Poets Choice. And to that extent Joanne Burns deserves your support.

IAN HUGHES

Poet's Choice 1973. Island Press 65 Beachcomber Avenue, Bundeena 44pp. \$

Joanne Burns Ratz. Saturday Centre Poets' Series No. 2. Available from the Saturday Centre, Box 140 P.O. Cammeray, N.S.W. 2062, 24pp., \$1.50.

NOTICES

First, an explanation of it all. . . This is (it's hoped) the first of what will be a regular section of LINQ. In it we hope to provide brief mentions of magazines, books, etc. that have not (for any of a variety of reasons) been covered at length in the Reviews Section. A mention here does not preclude more detailed reference at a later date. If anyone can provide us with information — about virtually any form of literary endeavour — we'll do our best to pass it on through this section. So here we go. . . (alphabetically).

Ploughman's Lunch is a magazine edited by Gary Oliver and available from P.O. Box R217 Royal Exchange, Sydney 2000. Issues are approximately quarterly and cost \$1.25 each (subscriptions: \$5.00 p.a. locally; \$6.50 overseas). The letter we received with the "first series, second furrow" (in other words Vol. 1 No. 2) states that contributions of poetry, graphics, drawings, reviews and notes are welcomed. The issue we received has thirty-three poems, including three by rae desmond jones, three by Robert C. Boyce and various numbers by fifteen others. Most of the names are possibly unfamiliar to those of us here in the north, but its all competent, solid poetry. The few weak poems are balanced by a few that really work (like Alison Hughes' "Wait Til the Revolution", rae jones' "the sparklers" and John Edwards' "Nobbled Horses"). Add to that the fact that its well produced (printed cover designed by David Hall, good clear typography) and you have something thats definitely worthwhile.

Those who read *Living Daylights* may have come across *Tabloid Story* No. 4 tucked quietly away in the middle of one of the very early issues. It's a publication for imaginative prose writing and available both as a supplement to various periodicals and as a separate entity through bookshops. Recommended price is 20¢ with \$2.00 p.a. subscription. For interested contributors they ask first use only, Australian rights, Pay \$50 per 1000 words (thanks to Commonwealth Literary Fund) and copyright for all items resides with the authors. Address is Box 4430, G.P.O. Sydney, N.S.W. 2001. Number 4 has four stories plus a notices section in 8 pages. The contributions (by Bill Beard — excellent, Geraldine Willesee — good but over-emotional for my taste, Ronald Allan — interesting, and S. Steynes — between good & excellent) are all very contemporary and while there be those who find it all too much, the quality is undeniably high and, I think, bodes well for the future. Most pieces can be filed under Names To Watch For.

Finally, *Your Friendly Fascist* is roneoed, Sydney-based, and edited by Rae Desmond Jones and Sandy Clark. The address is Box A487, Sydney South Post Office, N.S.W. 2000. We know nothing about price (if any). The issue they sent us has 36 poems on 22 pages. Quality of the writing is generally high. I particularly liked Tom Wallace's concrete "Galaxy", Sandy Clark's "Summary of Parental Influences" and Rob Andrew's two short poems. The only cause for complaint is the standard of printing and typography, but that's aesthetic rather than literary.

Compiled by

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